

DRAWING THE GLOBAL

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Orientations

Considering the oldest documents of parietal art, around 30.000 years BCE in Europe, we can state that drawing, that is, the inscription of lines and other graphic marks on surfaces as a meaning-making activity, as a way of communication, as a way for the creation of aesthetic forms (and these aspects are certainly not isolated but integrated in specific ways in the early activity of drawing and its products) is as old as humanity. Or, as old as that stage of humanity in which the need arose for more structured, stable forms of communication among humans, and also of communication between humans and other domains of reality with their beings or entities, domains that have been retrospectively called “sacred” or “religious”. According to some specialists, the notion of contacts with a supersensible reality describes a possible context for the understanding of Pre-historic cave art.

And that stage of more complex communicative demands is related to the development of language and tool making, that is, to the interrelated developments of verbal communication (in the context of a previous, more or less stabilized language of gestures) and of early technology. This is the first or original instance to characterize the “universality” of drawing historically distributed in time and space. Like language itself that once developed became the means by which humans are defined and define themselves, the conscious forms of graphic creations serving different and related needs contribute to the organization of human beings’ relationship to human beings, that is to both self and other, and their relationship to the world, to the development of human time and the creation of both ideal and material human spaces.

One of the important characteristics of early parietal art, as well as later artworks in rocks and caves, such as the art of Australian aborigines, is that of mapping reality, instituting boundaries and outlining territories, defining group identities by organizing space, providing coordinates that relate the local and the universal, connecting everyday spaces, specialized spaces of identity and survival, to nature, to the cosmos, to the universal structures that sustain and provide directions and also meanings to human life.

The “first” globalization

As the anthropological and archeological narrative goes, out of Africa the first humans spread to the continents and, in time, adapted to different environments and material conditions. In this process, diverse social formations, cultures, and languages emerged within the long duration of social development. The beginnings of civilization in the Middle East also mark the growth of more systematic contacts and exchanges among distant and diverse populations, the interactions, diffusions and

selective adaptations of ideas, material resources, technology, including the techniques of social organization. A process we could perhaps designate, imaginatively, as a first “globalization”.

As we go forward with the “video file” of history (allow me this by now rather commonplace image) we find an intensification of the rhythms of historical changes and the emergence of inter-regional organization of the geographic space into spheres of domination and influence between established social formations, with their structures of power, productive structures, social structures (estates, castes, classes), etc., arising from the social division of labor.

Spatial divisions and unifications in time

In our times, the modern states represent a development and a qualitative transformation of institutional domains whose incipient or “original” forms emerged with the early civilizations of Mesopotamia (and Egypt). And it is within the context of the historical development of the social – economic and political formation of the present that we look back at the long duration of past history and discover a kind of “manifest destiny” of the unification of the world, that is, not just a cumulative intensification of contacts and exchanges between different regions, state forms, cultures, etc., but the structural condition of interconnections and interdependence.

As it appears at this historical juncture, the logic of the very process that consolidated the national states in our modern period is leading, inexorably, by way of a change of scale that implies qualitative transformations (from the national context to the global), to a new consolidation of a supranational or transnational order. However, far from promoting equality among its parts, as it is commonly represented, this incipient international order preserves the asymmetries of power that structure the internal organization of individual countries, that is, the social division of labor proper to our class structured national formations is reflected in the international division of labor (and vice-versa).

At the basis of such modern developments there are, clearly enough, the demands of the economic sphere, that is of modern capitalism, the historical system that creates material wealth under the “exclusive” economic and social form of commodities. Capitalism: the system of universal production and circulation of commodities, whose horizon and condition of possibility, that is, at the same time premise and goal, is the world market.

Now, all this “grand historical narrative” just sketched in the previous paragraphs serves the purpose of contextualizing the current debates on the notion of globalization, including the discussions of global culture and global art. “Grand narratives” are certainly always problematic but, *contra* Lyotard, we can say that they are not simply that, but are also indispensable at times not as a final, but as an initial perspective whose function is not to consolidate ideological standpoints, once and for all, but to disclose a field of possibilities within a given process of development. For history can teach us not simply about the “facts” of the past but about the “choices” of the past, that is, the specific past responses to vital

questions with their specific constraints and motivations as well as the “multiple possibilities” inherent in every choice.

Technology and the market

According to Frederic Jameson, the new reality that we designated by the term “globalization” is a novel social-historic phenomenon that requires (and in time will most likely give rise to) new approaches, new epistemological perspectives, and new disciplines of knowledge. The concept of globalization, he states, “reflects the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as of the horizon of the world market.” (1)

The “global” of our globalized times, therefore, is premised on two essential conditions: the world market and technology. The world market: a creation of modern capitalism that turns out to be its condition of expansion and survival, as Marx (2) explained in the Communist Manifesto (1848). Technology: in the context of the socio-economic structure, it is fundamentally the system of means to develop the productivity of human work resulting in economy of time that speeds the circulation of commodities and the circuit of capital in the process of creating value and profit. These are the two basic or infrastructural conditions from which the modern world in all its complexity of aspects, forms of life and forms of consciousness has developed. And also from which a new “post-modern” world emerges, premised, according to Jameson, on the expansion to new, unprecedented levels of the world market.

What is changing or has changed before our eyes are the scope and the speed of accumulation of both capital and knowledge, that is, of socially created and privately appropriated wealth on one hand, and technology on the other. And these transformations in our time demonstrate also the potential to challenge, dialectically, both the actual structures they are based upon, as well as our very concept of knowledge.

The new scale of accumulation, imply qualitative changes in our world, changes we are all aware of, in different ways, without however being able to fully understand at this point the sense and direction of the process of change. What we do understand, more or less clearly, is that the transformations we witness today affect in many different ways the totality of our *life-world*, including our institutions, our language and forms of communication, our world-view, our forms and the substance of our own self-representation and knowledge, that is, culture and the arts.

The early formative period of the historical transformations we see today can be located in the late 1960s, a period of structural and cultural shifts affecting the advanced economies of the (self-designated) Western World.

The discourse of art: between ideology and utopia

What we can call the “discursive turn” of art starting in the 1960s and consolidated by the end of the century, it is, as everybody knows, something more than the general relationship of art to a categorical,

concentrated or diffused, context of ideas. For it is clear that art has always been embedded in thematic and narrative contexts and related performative contexts (religious, political, cultural, etc.). The *critique of the institutional domain of art as a mode of artistic praxis*, perhaps the dominant mode of artistic practice today, is a specific development that results from the self-reflective dimension of modern art as such, and the radicalization of that dimension in the works of the historical avant-gardes in the early 20th century. Within a new context, new and somewhat paradoxical developments of the critical ideal emerge.

In specific ways, the art of the 1960s, that we can identify as the initial artistic ground of our own period, can be said to re-elaborate, under a new social, cultural and technological context, central aspects of the radical challenge to the concept and praxis of art in modern times exemplified in the heritage of, among others, Cubism, Dadaism and Futurism. The “invention” of collage by Picasso, for instance, was indeed a pivotal moment in modern art, when the art object was redefined and therefore our understanding of what the aesthetic experience consists of was also modified in radical ways. From the challenges to representation and to the established boundaries of art by the Cubists, focused on the transformations of the artwork or the art object, evolved later by a series of mediations from the product to the context of production, the radical critique of “art as an institution” by Dadaism, and also in specific aspects by Futurism. The heritage of Dada and Futurism was re-elaborated in the art of Marcel Duchamp, the “proto-conceptualist” of the early 20th century.

What we can call the “canonization” of Duchamp by emerging artistic currents in the 1960s and the 1970s implied also an adaptation of the heritage of Dadaism. In certain aspects, the works of Duchamp can be said to “prepare the ground” for the “discursive turn” of late 20th century art, after the “linguist turn” affecting the thought (philosophy, humanities, social sciences) of the period. The more explicit political dimension of Dada, for instance (such as in Heartfield), was subsumed in Duchamp under the “linguistic” or “meta-linguistic” elaborations of a conceptual critique in the form of an autonomous “critique of the concept”, considered as a way to refashion the material object of the critique.

Of course, this characterization, and the “dichotomy” it implies between the conceptual and the objective, must be taken *cum grano salis*, for it is precisely the attempt to surpass recurrent categorical dualities (call it “binary oppositions”) in theory and in interrelated practical matters, that marked some of the most interesting and fruitful conceptual and creative efforts of the period.

Within late 20th century art and art theory, thanks to new perspectives such as feminism, the multicultural problematic, the emergence of minorities’ perspectives, etc., we can point out that a tension evolved between autonomy and heteronomy in the thinking and the practice of art. A tension that, while it was able to bring to the fore the ideological dimension of every critique (artistic or aesthetic, epistemological, ethical, sociological, etc.) and in this sense to shatter unifying perspectives, and to challenge the theoretical assumptions underlying previous conceptualizations and practices, persisted nonetheless, as it persists today in its essential dimensions, as an unresolved matter at the core of our understanding and of the current “multidimensional” praxis of art, called “post-modern” by many.

The notion of an “art after the end of art”, or the era of artistic pluralism, brought forth by Arthur Danto (3) to characterize the art of the late 20th century, has a certain ironic connotation, for the expression “end of art” does not necessarily mean the end of artistic practice in general, its exhaustion or final, concluding moment, but the end of “the end of art” itself, that is, of the autonomous self-critical instance at the core of the praxis and theory of the historical avant-garde that marked the history of modernism and constituted both its conclusion and negation, or the *aufhebung* (overcoming, suppression and conservation) of modernism by modernist means.

Historically, the modern notion of art’s autonomy has its origin in the Renaissance, and developed in time, among other aspects, as a kind of weapon in the fight against the tutelage of the cultural sphere by religion and conservatism. The dialectic of historical development is what explain the fact that it could give rise later to a conservative “ideology of art” or the “religion of art” (Benjamin), the ideological notion of artistic experience as the experience of the “ineffable” that considers art as a kind of “embodiment” of a “transcendent” domain of the “supersensible”, and aesthetic experience as the last refuge of ideals and values in a world devaluated by the imposed universality of the commodity form.

The idea of the “end of art” developed by Hegel in the early 1800s didn’t imply, again, the cessation of artistic activity as such, but an epochal shift that marked a new situation of “marginality” for art in the new social-historical formation of the present, where the core of culture was now occupied by science, by rational and philosophical knowledge. The Life of the Imagination, central to the cultures of the past, as Hegel explained, was dislodged of its dominant position by Reason and rational conduct in the new times. Hegel’s question was, explicitly at times, implicitly most of the time, at the center of the practical and ideological interrogations of artists in the 19th century and early 20th century. In many ways, it is the original conceptual background of the question of the avant-garde.

Side by side with a “dystopian” dimension, reflecting the historical traumas of European society in the early 20th century, the “utopian” element within the artistic praxis of the historical avant-gardes, specifically in Dada and also Surrealism, pointed to the surpassing of art into a new praxis of life. To put it succinctly, the seeds of the art of the future were at the same time, and in reciprocal relationship, the seeds of a new society, a new social and cultural reality in which art as the separated sphere of our “abstract universality” masking the concrete separations, the conflictive structural realities of the modern world, would be superseded by the new forms of life realizing the “concrete universality” of our human condition. In this sense, the end of art, paralleling Marx’s critique of philosophy as a reflection of a reversed reality, would be its final realization.

Now, as every utopian perspective carries within itself ideological elements, or, to put it in a different way, utopian thinking develops in an essential confrontation with its ideological other, therefore it displays a kind of “unity in contradiction” with ideology, it is also absorbed by its other, as the “regime of justifications”, the prevailing ideological concepts of a given social formation evolves to respond to changes in the actual life world and its material substratum. Ideology renews itself by absorbing utopian perspectives, and in the process it neutralizes the negative (critical) element in every utopian conceptualization. And, clearly enough, such a process is not just a question of subjective

representations or mental dispositions of social groups, but of the material context, that is, of the institutional apparatuses that sustain ideological processes.

I believe that the situation we find ourselves within the present early 21st century context of the arts, and within the practice and conceptualization of the artistic “globalization” process, is, to put it rather briefly, that of the “institutionalization of institutional critique”. A paradoxical situation, indeed, in which the problematics of “historical repetition” discloses (unconscious) elements of parody within the “self-critical” assessment of the times.

The new centrality of curatorial perspectives, the centrality of large international art exhibitions, biennales, art fairs, etc., and the close relationships between the “autonomous” institutions of art, the museum and public and private collections in the first place, and those of the art market are central characteristics of the artistic context of our time. The unifying requirements of such a materially enlarged sphere of art activities contrast with the extent in which the ideology of difference is summoned to validate the incorporation of the many into a unified albeit geographically, aesthetically and culturally enlarged concept. Divergent notions and practices are “exalted” as equal citizens of the city of arts. We are reminded of the type of unity proper to the commodity form which is indifferent to its material embodiments in concrete uses and needs, and of the resulting contradictions between *use value* and *exchange value*. Value in use and value in exchange can only co-exist as a potentially contradictory unit in the commodity, and their relations in the exchange process is a relation of subordination.

The globalization of the image

Jameson’s characterization of the two central and interrelated aspects to understand globalization: the market and technology, can serve us here as a guiding thread to our present situation in the arts. On one hand we have the internationalization of the art market, following the emergence of new financial and consumers’ markets around the world, and the reciprocal influences between the practices of art and the conditions of circulation of artistic products. On the other we have the new technologies of communication, technologies of visual production and circulation of artistic products. There is indeed, I think, an interesting tension between these domains: while technologies of communication allow for the intensification of the symbolic exchanges proper to the process of internationalization, technologies of production contribute to refashion in ever more radical ways artistic practices, objects, genres and disciplines and therefore to challenge the limits of current categories, including the category of “difference” (and its correlates: authenticity, pluralism, identity, etc.) and the established institutional structures promoting a formally “all inclusive” ideology that may mask the dimensions of power, symbolic and material, sustaining a geographically extended and materially concentrated art world.

With the new digital technologies and the internet, ultimately the processes of production and distribution become just different aspects of one and the same process. If the new technologies of

communication serve the needs of the present globalization process, of the extended, unified and hierarchically structured world market with its center and peripheries, it is also true that contradictions do emerge between technological developments and the economic sphere. The virtual worlds of communication and computerized technologies bring new possibilities of dissemination, distribution and diffusion side by side with the possibilities of extended symbolic control and unification.

Already in the 1930s Walter Benjamin (4) observed that as with the development of printing technologies in the late 19th century, the new technologies of the image in modern times, photography and film, allowed for the emergence of a public of experts and the transformation of readers and viewers into writers and image makers challenging in radical ways the established artistic division of labor between producers and consumers. Also, the spatial and temporal mobility of artworks in the era of technological reproduction, affecting the “aura” of the artwork, that is its unique existence in time and space (the basis of its traditional authority), modified our relation to the work of art. And, necessarily, it modified the work itself in its essence and functions: the new technological artworks implied a change of context and therefore a change of nature that affected not only art’s future but also its past. In the sense that photography and film were able to record the collective life of the modern subjects and to represent previously unrepresented social and material aspects of reality, they can be considered at the same time as products and as *producers* of modernity. The revolutionary and democratic potential of such developments were the focuses of Benjamin’s analysis. In the era of digital technologies and the internet we can perhaps state that the potential for a universal creative life, fulfilling the dream of the avant-garde, is still confined within the limits of the social division of labor and its objective as well as subjective structures, as “globalization”, the onset of a planetary consciousness and a planetary way of life of mutual responsibility, is confined and restricted within the inherited and ongoing asymmetries of power, national and regional, that makes of the “real existing” globalization process, by contrast to its various more or less idealized images, a source of uncertainty, instability and conflicts.

Global experiences

The “global” designates current spatial and temporal changes in the contexts of human life, a process that connects regions, societies, cultures and “unifies” the diverse in more or less contradictory or conflictive ways, in a time of accelerated changes in the circuits of material production and in the circuits of symbolic exchanges and symbolic transformations.

The concept of globalization, according to Roland Robertson, “refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole” (5). Starting in the 1970s, Henri Lefebvre (6) pointed out the centrality of the questions of space in the contemporary world: having reached its geographical limit, in the sense of a complete disclosure of all the territories and

regions of the earth, contemporary society faces an emerging, a new spatial context that contributes to transform radically the questions of historical time and historical processes, of past and future. In the mid-1990s Paul Virilio remarked: “The twin phenomena of immediacy and of instantaneity are presently one of the most pressing problems [...]. Real time now prevails above both real space and the geosphere. The primacy of real time, of immediacy, over and above space and surface is a fait accompli and has inaugural value (ushers a new epoch). Something nicely conjured up in a (French) advertisement praising cellular phones with the words: "Planet Earth has never been this small". This is a very dramatic moment in our relation with the world and for our vision of the world.” (7)

In different ways, these writers approach one and the same problematic: our experiences of space and time, of place, distance, proximity, presence, the rhythms of life, communication, memory, etc. develop now in a new context : a context that creates constant challenges to our established modes of understanding and modes of action. In the confluence of symbolic understanding and symbolic action or symbolic production, the role of art in our time is once again to provide a type of cartography of human experience, connecting with their differential aspects, hopes and trials, past, present and future. The experience of art is, in its central aspects, that of the coming to be of experience, a projection and actualization into the future of our situated being.

The Global Drawing project, linking young artists in the globalized space of communications today, rather than a simple inventory of current practices, it is such a cartography: it maps new developments here and now, and the simultaneous openings of new routes resulting from the larger view of the territories of the present. To draw is to situate oneself in space and time. Art gives form to experience, and in doing so it allows artists and viewers to establish a dialogue with time itself, a dialogue made of both memory and anticipation. It allows us to expand our understanding of the many dimensions of our times and spaces, and to locate ourselves within the territories of the past, the present and the future.

NOTES

(1) Jameson, Frederic (1999) – Preface to “The Cultures of Globalization”, Jameson, F. and Miyoshi, M., editors. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

(2) “Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.”

Marx and Engels – The Communist Manifesto (1848)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>

(3) Danto, Arthur (1997) – After the End of Art; contemporary art and the pale of history. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

(4) Benjamin, Walter (1936) – The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, in Benjamin, W. (1969) – Illuminations. Translated by Harry Zohn; ed. by Hannah Arendt; New York: Schocken Books.

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

(5) Robertson, Roland (1998) - Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture. London: Sage Publications.

(6) Lefebvre, Henri (1991) – The Production of Space. Oxford: Blackwell. Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith. French original: 1974

(7) Virilio, Paul (1995) - Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!

in Ctheory; August 27, 1995, translated by P. Riemsens

<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/paul-virilio/articles/speed-and-information-cyberspace-alarm/>